Asbestos, Que.,
August 15, 1944

Mr. R. S. Gardner:

RE: SURVEY OF FE...LE WORKERS IN
TEXTILE DEPARTMENT

Herewith is a report with recommendations made from interviews with seventy female workers in the Textile Department. I did not see seven; five were off sick, one was getting married and one changed shifts.

Miss L. Lavergne gave me invaluable assistance, not only as an interpreter, but also could advise me on the extent of problems because of her long service in the department.

For two of the charts at the back I am indebted to Mr. Jean Bédor, student of Industrial Relations at the University of Montreal. He has had considerable experience in making this type of survey.

I think you will be gratified to note that I heard no complaints about supervisors or wages, except for the quiter operators, who are given special consideration in the reports.

After the meeting this morning, I would like to add that several of the girls have mentioned that many other girls would be available for work if it were not for the bad health reputation of the department in the entire community. I sincerely believe that if this were rectified that the female labour market would be much more plentiful and that would undoubtedly help us a great deal in the present emergency. A large number of these girls regard themselves as temporary workers so the problem of post-war employment would not be serious.

Joan Ross Joan Ross

c.c.
Mrs. A.A.Tetley
Mr. H. H. Sharpe.
Mr. McGee

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SURVEY OF FEMALE EMPLOYEES IN TEXTILE DEPARTMENT

A survey of the absentee reporting for employees in the Textile Department shows that the absentee rate is one, the highest in the entire Asbestos plant of Canadian Johns-Manville. The survey of files the have become a topic especially with others, while working in the department has become a topic of conversation throughout the entire community and is a serious detriment to the reputation of the Company.

Attached as Chart No. I is the absentee record for this department since February 1943 when the detailed check on absenteeism by the Industrial Relations Department was inaugurated. Note that from Feb. 1943 to the early part of Sept. 1943 the absentee records show the number of persons away from work. After Sept. 1943 the records were kept on the basis of lost minutes.

In the 19 months of this record the absentee rate of the Textile Department was about double the rate for the entire plant on 8 months or more, only twice was the rate for the entire plant higher than in this department. The rest of the nine months the Textile rate was higher than the rest of the Plants.

Separations:

The attached Chart No. III showing the separations from the Textile Department indicates that more than 50% of the employees leaving do so because of illness.

The Industrial Relations Department has been working on the separations of girls from this department to 23 cases have been studied in detail in which all the girls left because of illness due to pulmonary trouble or certain other conditions such as asthma ( random condition ) which might predispose to tuberculosis. The following is known about the present condition of these ex-employees.

1. Four are now working.
2. Six are married and in poor health.
3. Five have a definite diagnosis of tuberculosis.
4. Six are ill with other troubles, ( one is a Tb. suspect ) or are resting under doctor's orders.
5. Two are unknown.
6. One half are now ill.

Regarding the high tuberculosis rate, it must be borne in mind that the Tb. rate for males is roughly 2/3 that of all Canada when the population is 2/3 the total of the Dominion.

Three Chief Problems:

Three factors are responsible for the absentee rate being so high for health reasons:

1. Dust, bad ventilation and cold at nights.
2. Fatigue.
3. Young employees rarely have a higher rate of absenteeism than rule. Except for the office, this is the only department in the Company which has any such employees.

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Textile Department Survey

I. Dust and Ventilation and Humidity

The dust in the Textile Department is several times the worst in the factory.

The dust is especially bad in two places:

1. Under the mezzanine where the twisters are located. They get the dust from the cards.

2. Above the mezzanine where the looms are located. They also get the dust from the cards.

The dust is worst in winter, at night and on windless days because there is no cross ventilation. The suction takes the dust out but no fresh air is returned to the department. One foreman states that in winter with all windows closed the air pressure is very heavy.

Many complaints were made about the cold. It is damp and cold at night during the months when the heat is off. At night in winter it is so cold that the girls say they have to wear several sweaters, sometimes coats and overshoes, and still they freeze. The worst spot is the location mentioned above under the mezzanine. This is the hottest in summer and the coldest in winter because of no movement of air.

Two of the girls who work on the twisters beneath the mezzanine have suggested that a window or other partition be cut between the floors and the Textile departments. This would permit air to come into the section which is now a dead air space. A fire door could be placed for use in case of emergency.

The high percentage of short term absenteeism due to respiratory disease is greatly affected by these conditions and until they are corrected the department will suffer from absenteeism. This problem can only be dealt with by the Company.

II. Fatigue:

The problem of fatigue is a serious one in all industries at this time. Fatigue may become the cause of many accidents and is a contributing factor in most of the absenteeism whether serious illnesses like T.B. or short term absenteeism from colds or discomfort during monthly periods.

The experience of other industries shows that the problem of fatigue must be attacked by the employer, the worker and the community at large in certain aspects of the problem.

After interviewing the girls I would say that fatigue must be considered from the following standpoints:

1. The midnight to eight shift takes a toll from such fatigue that it becomes a permanent problem and is not thrown off a few the week of night shifts is over.

2. The ordinary fatigue which comes from any sort of work and can be avoided to a considerable extent by such things as brief, regular rest periods, between meals feedings etc.

3. The outside problem of white of getting, not resting, after work but "running around" instead, work at home ( this is not a very serious problem here ) and the part-time educational scheme of the workers.

Night Shift:

All workers complained of the night shifts. Almost all say they are so exhausted after the week on midnight to eight that it takes several days to recover from it. Operators who have been here for years say they never get over being tired. Fewer I say that longer hours during the day would be much less tiring on them than the "graveyard" shift.

Chart No. IV shows the tabulation of various returns. It will be noted the

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Textile Department - Survey

So a plan could be worked out for all the girls to have dinner with their family it could be better to consume a hot meals that noon hour. But a compromise is more desirable than ten or neither.

On the Chart No. IV. the number of girls who do not carry lunches at night is given. All these girls say they would bring lunches if hot drinks were available but that they find cold food alone makes them feel nervous. Unfortunately the new jugs are almost unobtainable so that this solution does not seem possible now.

5. Similar to the hot foods matter is that of drinks on the night shifts. During the day a dairy distributes milk which is so popular but on the night shifts the only beverage is soft drinks. One of the foremen suggested that coffee and tea may reduce the not helping the health of the girls. Last year for a few weeks milk was distributed at night but the dairy was not able to continue the service. Several of the workers mentioned that they found the chocolate milk a great help last year.

I would recommend that the Company try to make arrangements for milk being served to the two night shifts.

6. It has been noted by several Company officials that the bulk of the absenteeism from work is departmental in short periods. The two short illnesses are colds and nausea at monthly periods. It is mostly the younger girls the miss at the latter time.

I cannot refrain from noting that the majority of girls in this group are of a slight build and do not look very strong. They are so young that their physical development has probably not reached its full maturity. Standing for eight hours is hard work and the twisters and some other machines require a great deal of stretching which is hard on the girls who are in the best health.

I would suggest that two seats be placed in the department for the use of girls who are feeling discomfort with an understanding that ten or fifteen minutes be the limit of time they can use them. But that they may return to the seat later if feeling badly again. At least at first. I think it would be wise not to post them off work. Two of the older operatives suggested that girls can go to the seats provided for the entire Factory, but the girls felt that they would rather stay here for a walk to the front of the factory and lose time anyway by pursuing out and in from the department.

The seats do it is separate from the rest room if possible.

As we do not have matron service it would be necessary to devise some plan to ensure that this privilege is not abused. The best idea I know would be to have the girls register in a book when they rest and then investigate if it is true that the girls are not using the offers.

It is my own opinion that little Company can correct the previous which are obviously contributing to sickness that after hot steam smokers can be taken to deal with a penic offenders. It is quite probable that only a small group of the whole, but for the pleasure for them one disrupts the whole morale of the group. If we can be certain that working conditions are not contributing to sickness absenteeism we can fire the girls who are just playing around but at present there is no cause for laxness it is in the factory and one is inclined to give absentees the benefit of the doubt that their absence is excusable.

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Textile Department Survey

III. Outside Problems:

Home Work:

Knowing that home duties take a heavy toll of time and strength on the part of the women workers, I have asked each group about their home circumstances. It is with some surprise that I learned that very few of the workers carry responsibility for housework at home. From several widows with large broods of children have no home, usually an older daughter is left after to do house. The case the work the most is to do so, usually, because of illness on the part of the mother, sister etc.

Recreation:

The greatest outside problem is that these girls, the ages for the most part quite young, 17 to 20, do not rest as they should, especially when on night shift, with the result that they work at very high strain. The canteen are very quiet in the afternoons, as the seriousness of the problem. The older women also say that the young ones do not take care of themselves. In fact, Mr. Milton, of the Industrial Hygiene Foundation, in reply to a letter from us, says in a letter dated July 2, 1944 :- " It is our opinion that some of the absence due to sickness (among female workers) is the result of an abnormal amount of energy in the hands of those more or less unaccustomed to the wages with the group draws ".

It would be worth while, I think, if occasionally during a lunch period, an x-ray like a survey, the x-ray French, were to go to the factory and give the girls a short talk on health.

Nutrition:

Another phase of this problem is nutrition. Unfortunately this group of women generally has low standards of living and particularly in respect to diet. Much of the constitutional inferiority is due to this fact. In looking over Compensation Insurance cards one notes the frequency of such remarks as "weakness", "anaemia", "general debility", etc. all indicating low vitality and ill health.

Similar to the above suggestion about lectures would be the showing of films. I should not attempt a lecture in French, with its language's limitations, but I think we could plan interesting and helpful programs on preventive medicine, with perhaps a few minutes question period following. Perhaps a Red Cross nurse could bring for two or three evenings a lantern slide talk on home nursing, and the girls also would not bother to pay one.

Other Considerations:

Textures and Dangers [illegible]: [illegible] that work on these machines is most difficult in the department. I would say that these jobs have remuneration considerations. It does not seem fair that work like is perhaps twice as hard should receive the same amount of pay.

Several factors make their work such [illegible]

In there is continual work on the machines very fast and the girls run [illegible] not to on the job every minute. Even any time, do not even stop [illegible] have to wait of. The machines must work [illegible] is against the [illegible] can only be done if all the operators [illegible] at the same time.

3. These machines require continual supervision, and complaints if some

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Textile Department Survey

...thing could be done to remedy the machines it would be a great help. Young girls are not as a rule well up in ... matter to try to adjust the machines to fit the operators than wear out the operators. ... of the girls on these ... unions say they never come to work during the first day of the monthly periods. It is the stretching which is put on to the machines that ...

2. For more reason the organization of the department does not provide for the supplying of steam to these machines as they do all the others. All the operators on all three shifts say that the ... under. Ironing on Monday's back is running after the steam ... Sometimes the loss of time is sometimes ... ing it is not infrequently 15 minutes before they can start work.

3. These machines and the fumes are also not ... to the girls. They throw off the dust and many ... fibers which ... to the bad dust ... The odors are claimed at this time ... the dust is ... bad that sometimes the girls just have to leave the machines entirely. Also they have so much time lost of girls (2 last Saturday) out work on Saturday and then have the ... on the job have more work.

The other phase of the cleaning is that of cleaning the machines with ... The complaint that the vacuum ... their skin and the girls told us they suffer from eczema.

It would seem better to have all the machines cleaned by one ... of the persons said that if the machines were stopped and the department clear it would take a crew only a couple of hours to do this on Saturday night. The men could take turns doing this and not work much more than one Saturday night in a month.

4. If it is impossible to enjoy the wages on these ... I would suggest the serious consideration be given to having limited periods of these machines. Sometimes these operations are very severe workers that they ... a half shift on the job then change off with another operator. So many of the girls have worked on these machines that this right to ... be.

5. ... operations on these machines ought to limited to six months at a stretch.

In any case I think it is these operations which cause much of the trouble and that they require ... attention. One of the other operators said that at least ... girls have left work while working with me - I think the period was about three years.

... lever ... up the ... about the machines that ... off the girls ... They ... gave ... their work or ... away from the machines ... a certain time they would not mind so much. It is the thought that they ... work there until they get very sick ... have to quit work that makes the ... hate the job so much.

Relation of Personnel

... present of the girls told of their dissatisfaction with the present industrial methods.

At present a girl ... ted to work, in the factory, applies to the ... ment Manager in Industrial Relations Department. She is duly interviewed and examined by the Factory ... hired. So far so good.

The girl ... reports to work ... Mr. ... her way to the factory with some very ... way to a ... sales residence. Then alone she ... her way to the Textile Department. ... Inspired usually pays ... the average that the girl is hired ... lever ... late, a ... she is not ... well, for her other

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Textile Department Survey

than plain interest and sympathy. She may not even be in her office when the new girl arrives.

It is Miss Lovegrove who usually introduces the newcomer to the forewoman and the next procedure is that the new worker is usually told to go over there to where those girls are and watch them till you can do the work.

The forewoman, who say they are too busy to teach each newcomer everything about the job, the older operators who feel very sorry for the newcomer, and the new girl who may be very shy and embarrassed and ready to cry and go home dislike the methods. On one shift the older girls apparently had such a bad time that over after a few, of them have taken special pains with the new girls. The other two shifts had reasonably kind girls who were still smarting about their first days. There should have the definite responsibility of teaching the new girls.

There are several operators who have worked with the machines and have taught a lot of new workers. The Textile Department should select one, (see above) who could assist in orientation, and that person should receive special remuneration for the task of tutoring.

Again, an older worker was taken, the girls appeals to me in several ways. First, the necessity of men is such that I do not think the forewoman can do more than they are doing now. Those who actually operate the machines are often better at teaching a new operator.

And the women could do more than just teach the mechanics of the job. She could do a great deal to build in the new girls attitudes which are often more important than the physical work. For instance, the whole problem of Absenteeism is one of mental attitudes. It is very obvious that the older operators take their jobs for war production more seriously than many of the younger girls. All need to make the "home fillies" realize that their job is very important money for a few years or a permanent and that they are needed too much to [illegible] work one time Pearl Baptiste asks for a date.

If the Company can be over sure that no faults lie on our side we can take steps to deal with the offenders whose absences are innumerable and a detriment to the Company's production.

Summarily speaking, the forewoman may that when the girls are on the job they work about 10 hours. Production is about the same on all the shifts, all complaints about the night shift to the contrary. If absenteeism were drastically reduced the production would be that much better.

Joan Ross
August 11, 1944

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